

Appleby Archaeology Group September 2006

The autumn season began with a talk by Andrew Hoane. Andrew, with a team of students and volunteers, led by Dr Helen Loney from Glasgow University, has undertaken fieldwork and excavations, over the last few summers in the Ullswater area and in particular in Glencoyne Park.

The aim of their project was to learn more about how local society developed in the first and second millennia BC, and how it interacted with the Romans after their invasion. Little is known of this period as there are few traces, and only a small number of artefacts have been found. The artefacts that are found tend to be of Roman origin and, so far, no native pottery of this period has been discovered. Advances in carbon dating and other techniques mean that other evidence such as charcoal and pollen can now be accurately dated.

Andrew started with an overview of the Roman occupation in Cumbria. The period of invasion lasted from around 70-90AD followed by a time of consolidation until 130. At the end of the second century life had settled down and by 260 local administrators were taking over from the military. The decline in Roman influence is evident from 350 onwards. The Roman presence in the Lake District lasted just over 200 years, or ten generations. Evidence of that presence is easily seen in the remains of fortifications, military camps and roads, and in artefacts and written records.

The field work was undertaken to find out more about what was happening before the Roman invasion. The landscape surveyed included Matterdale, Gowbarrow Fell and Mell Fell. Geophysical techniques and resistivity studies, both of which can detect buried features, were used and fifteen Iron Age or Romano-British sites were found, eight of which were within Glencoyne Park. The survey covered land between 100 and 700 metres but no site was found above 300m.

Andrew then described a site found at Threlkeld. This was an unenclosed site with a series of hut platforms, field boundaries and paddocks. Excavations revealed a possible round house and blacksmith's workings dated to 150-100BC. Both sites had been covered by cairns when they fell out of use. Stones that would have been used for grinding and smoothing were found along with an iron object. The number of stones might suggest that hides had been prepared on the site. Radiocarbon dating indicated that the site was occupied from 200BC to 200AD and it was concluded that those who occupied it were not well off.

A curvilinear enclosure was found at Glencoyne Park similar to Ewe's Close near Crosby Ravensworth. The enclosure was on a plateau overlooking Ullswater and was 40 metres in diameter with four hut circles. Initial excavations of one of the hut circles revealed the walls of a circular hut 15 metres in diameter with an entrance to the east. In Celtic mythology entrances faced the rising sun and the west was associated with night. Several flat slabs led from the entrance to a central hearth. Excavations to a depth of 10 centimetres found a layer of artefacts which included Roman pottery, fragments of a blue jar and of a glass bangle. This Roman detritus was an unexpected find. The Roman artefacts indicated that there had been interaction between the native Britons and the Roman around 150AD. Further examination of the hut walls showed that they were remodelled on five different occasions and evidence found in levels below the Roman artefacts indicate that the hut circle was in use for a period of 500 years from 150BC to 350AD. Excavation from the surrounding area suggest occupation of the site from 900BC and the nearby landscape of cairns and field boundaries provides evidence that there was activity in the vicinity 1500 years before the Romans.

The findings raise a number of questions about society in Cumbria over this period. It appears that people were living in curvilinear enclosures from about 300BC and that there was a higher population in areas such as Glencoyne Park than that of today with perhaps 70-80 people living in an enclosure. These enclosures are not typical of Bronze Age or Iron Age sites but they may have been focal points within an ancient landscapes and have had an important role in Iron Age society. There is nothing in the landscape around the unenclosed site at Threlkeld, which may have been an industrial site and nothing to indicate why either site was abandoned or why the Threlkeld site had no apparent contact with the Romans.

Many question remain to be answered. Much of the archaeology, which might have provided some of the answers, has gone with field improvements and the enclosures of the 18th century. Glencoyne Park was a deer park until the 19th century and thus more archaeology has been preserved which could, perhaps, yield further information about a period in the past of which we know little.

Andrew took questions from the floor before being thanked and warmly applauded.

The next meeting will be on the *Tuesday 10th October at 7.30pm*, in the Supper Room Market Hall Appleby, when Aaron Watson, who has recently been involved in the Monuments in Eden Project run by Penrith Museum will talk about *Neolithic and Bronze Age Ceremonial Monuments and their relationship to The Landscape*

PHR 26/9/06

